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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 002044

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SUBJECT: MDC CALLS ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO REACT

REF: PRETORIA 1554

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Donald Teitelbaum. Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. On 5 June, MDC Leader Morgan Tsvangirai held his first briefing for Pretoria's diplomatic corps to brief them on the ongoing human rights abuses in Zimbabwe and the plight of Zimbabwean refugees in southern Africa. A short video clip was shown of Tsvangirai visiting hundreds of Zimbabwean refugees crowded into a church to illustrate the MDC's point that the challenges are great and that it "cannot handle the problem alone." While the footage and Tsvangirai's speech were moving, Tsvangirai had little to add

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about his vision of the future and even less to say about the Mbeki-led SADC negotiation, which according to him "has not even started." Nevertheless, the MDC has a valid point. Since Mbeki was appointed mediator, much of the international coverage has died down, at least in South Africa, despite the continuing human rights abuses of Mugabe and systematic repression of the opposition by GOZ security forces. END SUMMARY.

HUMANITARIAN ABUSES CONTINUE IN SILENCE

12. (C) MDC Leader Morgan Tsvangirai on 5 June held his first briefing for the Pretoria diplomatic corps and described the effects of the crisis of governance, economic collapse, environmental stress, ongoing political repression, and human rights abuses inside and outside Zimbabwe. Tsvangirai read a prepared speech about deteriorating living conditions in Zimbabwe, citing increasing poverty and lower life expectancy. "Everything is in short supply, except misery," said Tsvangirai. He also added that the MDC is being targeted, with 1,000 MDC leaders detained with trumped up charges of terrorism since 11 March, 50 of whom are still incarcerated. (Note: Embassy Harare believes that Tsvangirai's reported estimates of detained MDC leaders

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overstates the situation, but concurs with the general thrust of his comment, and adds that as of the last week, incarcerations numbered 32. End Note)

13. (C) Tsvangirai accused the international community of "turning a blind eye" not only to the plight of Zimbabwean refugees, but to the impact the crisis is having on neighboring countries. According to Tsvangirai, around 5 million Zimbabwean refugees have flooded the region, with South Africa hosting 3.5 million and Botswana hosting "hundreds of thousands." (Note: South Africa estimates the

total number of Zimbabweans in South Africa between 1 and 2 million. End Note) According to Tsvangirai, in the absence of an internal military conflict or civil war, Zimbabweans who flee to neighboring countries to escape persecution and hardship are not given refugee status but are labeled "lawbreakers" and sent back to Zimbabwe. Tsvangirai said that those who return are often "never seen again" and those who manage to stay lack access to medical care because they do not have proper papers. Diplomats were then shown a crudely shot video taken on 4 June of Tsvangirai visiting the Central Methodist Church in Braamfontein, which is a sanctuary for Zimbabweans who fled to South Africa. According to the MDC, the church is hosting about 900 refugees, with an average of 20 new arrivals every day. They arrive after 9:00 PM each night and leave before sunrise to avoid being arrested as illegal immigrants. The first couple of minutes of footage showed hundreds of people sleeping on the floor in entrances, hallways, and stairwells, while the second half showed Tsvangirai in a pinstripe suit looking rather uncomfortable in front of a cheering crowd.

LITTLE MOVEMENT WITHIN MDC

¶4. (C) After Tsvangirai's speech, the floor was opened for questions. When asked by the German Ambassador how the MDC imagines its transition, Tsvangirai spoke about "Stage 1" of the process by repeating MDC's demands for a level playing field -- insisting on a new constitution and free and fair elections, which could only be achieved by a legitimate electoral commission, allowing Zimbabweans abroad the right to vote, equal access to media, and allowing international observers to monitor the 2008 election. Tsvangirai never mentioned a "Stage 2," adding rather nonchalantly that the "solution is simple," and that other issues like "transition of the security forces can be brought to the table as well."

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¶5. (C) As for the possibility of the two opposition MDC factions coming together, Tsvangirai told the crowd that the opposition is united in their desire for change but he did not appear optimistic about any sort of reunion. Tsvangirai told the crowd half-jokingly that "divorces are difficult and should be seen as a process, not an event." Political analyst Sydney Masamvu (Protect) later that day told PolOff that he also has little hope for any sort of reconciliation among opposition factions.

¶6. (C) When asked about the possibility of the opposition boycotting the election, Tsvangirai said the MDC does not have a crystal ball and therefore he cannot assess the potential of success of the SADC initiative. "It's premature to decide if we will boycott the election. We need to give mediation time." It's also presumptuous to view election in terms of a particular date, he suggested. "As far as we are concerned, the date is not important." In the end, he did not say whether they would boycott or not, but did say that people in Zimbabwe do not want to take part in an exercise that has a predetermined outcome (read: another bogus election and illegitimate ZANU-PF victory).

LESS FAITH IN SADC INITIATIVE

¶7. (C) Tsvangirai appeared to have little faith in the Mbeki-led SADC initiative, telling the crowd that negotiations among Zimbabwe's political parties have not even started. He also said that while the MDC wants the Mbeki initiative to succeed, the MDC needs "an honest broker" and "international assistance to ensure a peaceful environment." Tsvangirai believes that Mugabe's actions are scuttling any

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chance of success before talks even begin. He also said that ZANU-PF is stalling for time and had not yet submitted their response to MDC's operational concerns about moving forward toward democracy. ZANU-PF's delayed response forced Mbeki's team to cancel the 3 June meeting, which was supposed to hammer out the negotiation agenda. (NOTE: ZANU-PF submitted their response on 4 June. See septel. END NOTE)

COMMENT

18. (C) The briefing, which was novel in that it was the first time the MDC discussed its concerns with Pretoria's diplomatic community, offered little new insight into the situation and left many diplomats disappointed. However, the MDC's plea to keep up the pressure has substance. First, media coverage has steadily dwindled over the past couple of months, despite the continuing political repression, human rights abuses, and refugee flood. Second, in the absence of a militarized civil war, in comparison to conflicts like Darfur, and in the context of Mbeki being appointed mediator, Zimbabwe has been put on the back burner for many international observers as governments and organizations take a "wait and see" posture to avoid undermining Mbeki's efforts. However, more than two months into the process, Mugabe and his party have not slowed down in their systematic attempts to further slant the playing field in their favor. All the while, Zimbabweans continue to come across the border with hardly any safety nets to help them.

BOST